

State of Rhode Island
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE



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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
House Bill 5283
February 25, 2021

Thank you, Chair Casey, Vice Chairs McLaughlin and Donovan, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 5283 which would require all foster parents to undergo sensitivity training regarding the culture of their foster child.

My name is Jennifer Griffith and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). As part of our role as the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met.

Healthy child development is best supported through stability, predictability, and safety. Children in foster care can experience various types of instability including out-of-home placement changes, limited or lost contact with family members, friends, and other supportive adults known to the child. The federal *Fostering Connections Act* requires states to notify the relatives of a child placed in foster care. Kinship placements, which can include relatives or any adult close to the child, are prioritized for children entering foster care in order to maintain connections to family and culture, however, in some cases children may be placed with a family different cultural identity than that of the child. In cases like these, prioritizing connections to the child's cultural identity is important.

Cultural identity is a significant part of a child's identity and having a strong cultural identity leads to greater self-esteem, coping abilities, psychological adjustment, and higher educational achievement. These positive benefits are particularly critical for children in foster care. As a result, the benefits of a strong cultural identity and connections to culture for children in foster care cannot be ignored.

My office supports passage of House Bill 5283 which would require all foster parents to undergo sensitivity training regarding the culture of their foster child.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Griffith".

Jennifer Griffith, Esq.
Child Advocate